AN EXPLORATION AND APPLICATION OF LIEDER PERFORMANCE PRACTICES AND COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES TOWARDS THE POETIC AND MUSICAL STRUCTURES OF ROBERT SCHUMANN'S *MIGNON LIEDER*

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ABSTRACT

The author has explored the poetic elements and musical settings of "Mignon Lieder" composed by Robert Schumann based on the text from Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. The author has compared the poetic and musical structures of each song from the "Mignon Lieder", in order to capture the essence of Schumann's compositional style as well as the performance practice needed specifically for his lieder. These topics are directly linked to the close relationship between text and music and the ability to blend the two for a meaningful performance. Also, an analysis of Mignon, the character of which the "Mignon Lieder" were written, will be briefly discussed in order to bring a more in depth awareness to the reader. Overall, the exploration of these topics should bring more insight and further research for singers and pianists who will or have performed Schumann's lieder.

INDEX WORDS: Georgia, Public Education, Federal Education Subsidies.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the compositional techniques of Robert Schumann and Lieder performance practices in order to apply them to poetic elements and musical settings of his *Mignon Lieder*, Op. 98a, based on the text of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. The author will compare the poetic and musical structures of each song of *Mignon Lieder* in order to capture the essence of Schumann's compositional style as well as the performance practices needed specifically for his lieder. These topics are directly linked to the close relationship between text and music and the ability to blend the two for a meaningful performance. Also, a brief examination of Mignon—the character of whom the *Mignon Lieder* were written—will be discussed in each song in order to bring a more in-depth awareness to the context of the novel. Overall, the exploration of these topics should bring more insight and further research for singers and pianists who will or have performed Schumann's lieder. In order to enhance the author's performance of *Mignon Lieder*, the author hopes to better understand the abstract reasoning and concrete intricacies of Robert Schumann's unique style.

LITERARY REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

The well-educated musician can study a Madonna by Raphael, the painter a symphony by Mozart, with equal benefit. Yet more: in sculpture the actor becomes a silent statue while he brings the sculptor's work to life—the painter transforms a poem into an image, the musician sets a painting to music.

—Robert Schumann (Jensen 2001, 38)

In order to encourage a deeper, more philosophical understanding of Schumann's lieder for singers and pianists, one must come to know the driving forces behind the composer. Many, including family members, writers, and fellow composers, significantly influenced Schumann's compositional style and his musical and literary aesthetics. Also, his sporadic personality and, at

times, inner turmoil inspired his compositions. Although he suffered from a "manic-depressive" type illness, he possessed "an astonishing capacity to produce very great quantities of music in very short spans of time, [while] he [suffered] periods of total or near total creative standstill" (Perry 2007, 3). According to Perry, Schumann's extremes of feverish productivity to sudden halts of activity were a testament to a "creative modus operandi" that was intense and difficult to live with (Perry 2007, 3).

As a way to truly understand the history of Schumann's music, "we need to approach it through life, the literature, the poetry, and the philosophy" (Tadday 2007, 37). Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856) was born into an educated and cultured bourgeoisie family. His father, Friedrich August Gottlob Schumann, was a hardworking publisher-bookseller and an author of scholarly and belletristic works (Tadday 2007, 38). Their "middle class community of sorts enjoyed a certain social privilege", but were lacking in social integration due to their educated status (Tadday 2007, 38). Their education or *Bildung*, which implies a "process of formation – shaping and polishing –…allowed members of the middle class to claim familiarity with literature, music and painting...as [a way] to define the arts as integral elements of middle-class identity" (Tadday 2007, 38). For these middle-class members, culture itself was considered their medium or type of catalyst to which they found the significance of society and the reality of life (Tadday 2007, 38). For Schumann's father, his meaning of reality was found in the medium of literature, while Schumann found them in the medium of music (Tadday 2007, 38).

Schumann's musical aesthetics had deep literary roots, not only because of his father and his cultural surroundings, but also because of his individual development. While he was a young boy in school, "he began to show an interest in literature that was well above the average." Until he turned twenty, he was considering a career in writing, which is revealed through his

diaries and letters (Tadday 2007, 39; Jensen 2001, 38). He even created a "literary society" in 1825 with ten of his classmates, which promoted his love of literature. Schumann's passion for writing and his enthusiasm for literature clearly set him apart at a young age (Jensen 2001, 38). One of Schumann's classmates, Emil Flechsig, remembered a time when they began learning about Latin and Greek literature:

> "…we got into German poetry and stopped there, and [Robert] showed a decided talent for writing verse and composing German prose, as anyone can [see] from the collected edition of musical writings. We had unlimited opportunities to find out about literature: the whole Schumann house was crammed with the classics, and we were allowed to help ourselves to the soiled copies – I still have some of them" (Tadday 2007, 39).

In several letters to his wife Clara, Schumann revealed an active pursuit of being a lifelong learner who was "assiduous in both reading and writing from his childhood on." In an 1858 writing by Franz Brendel, he recalled the importance of literature in Schumann's life, saying he was "constantly occupied with reading, carried books with him wherever he went, read poetry on walks and wherever he was alone" (Brendel 1858, 139). For Schumann, music and poetry were woven together during the 1820s, and although he believed he was gifted as both a writer and composer, "the confusion and frustration he experienced in determining a choice of career could only have been compounded by the intimate association he perceived between the two arts" (Jensen 2001, 38). In an 1828 diary entry, Schumann states, "Tones are words, but on a higher level…Music is the higher power of poetry; angels must speak in tones, spirits in words of poetry…Every composer is a poet, only at a higher level" (Jensen 2001, p. 38). Jensen explains, "It reveals much about Schumann that, in eventually choosing music as a career, in his own mind he was selecting an art that he believed to be more elevated— 'at a higher level'—than poetry" (Jensen 2001, 38).

Much of Schumann's reading of German poetry was with "an eye toward its suitability for setting to music" (Jensen 2001, 42), and many of the contemporary German writers were the most alluring to him. In his diary, he mentions the works of Immermann, Grillparzer, Goethe, Humboldt, Schiller, Tieck, and Chamisso, to name a few (Jensen 2001, 42). According to Tadday, the writings of Jean Paul had the greatest significance, more so than all the books he had ever read in his life. Jean Paul's prose style influenced him to such a great extent that his compositions mirrored what he had been reading. For example, his compositions of the 1830s usually included: 1. A natural tendency for brief, "almost aphoristic musical statements." Jean Paul's work reveals a fondness for short, pithy statements he called "polymeters."; 2. "A love for mystery and concealed meaning. This is a notable characteristic of Jean Paul, one frequently encountered in his novels."; 3. "The quotation of thematic material from previous compositions in new ones." It was common for Jean Paul to make offhanded references to the plots and characters of earlier works; and 4. "The often abrupt juxtaposition of grotesque humor with elements of profound sentiment" (Jensen 2001, 79-80).

Jean Paul was fascinated by humor, and in Schumann's music, "humor is often created by contrast—startling and dramatic" (Jensen 2001, 79-80). Through the importance of humor, Jean Paul influenced Schumann's early and late works, which he defined himself as a "central category of philosophical aesthetics" (Tadday 2007, 42). However, Jean Paul's definition of humor is not the same as it is in our twenty-first century world. In order to fully grasp his idea of humor and Romantic irony, one would need to read his *Vorschule der Ästhetik,* or *Introduction to Aesthetics* (1804) and explore research on the characteristics of Romantic irony. Although Schumann was an advocate of humor, he believed there was a specific time and place for it;

therefore, "at the heart of his own understanding of music he rejected it" (Tadday 2007, 42). This seems to imply that a performer needs an almost empathetic ability to understand Schumann's sensitivities towards text and the way he set the texts to music.

Another method used to spur Schumann's literary creativity was to incorporate imaginary personalities into his music journal, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* ("New Journal of Music"). This group of real and imaginary artists were members of the music society *Davidsbündler,* or "The League of David," formed by Schumann. "The name of the League and its musical function was [his] creation; the idea for it was not. Popular German literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries drew upon the growth of secret societies such as freemasonry, and reveled in mysterious, secret organizations, whether political or cultural" (Jensen 2001, 103). The journal, founded by Schumann in 1834, made full use of the expressive possibilities of literature and poetry. It became the leading organization to introduce a "new art of criticism" that included technically accurate information about music and commentary (Perry 2007, 14). In his journal, Schumann's critical writings were different and interesting because he used alternating and contrasting voices of the *Davidsbündler*; each persona articulates in direct speech through Schumann's own voice, like wearing different "mask[s]" (Perry 2007, 14). These personas promise new identities for Schumann who is "understandably euphoric about the endless possibilities of shaping and reshaping what we would call someone's 'personality', and even begins using these new voices in all his writings: personal, journalistic and compositional (Perry 2007, 14). And once again, Jean Paul influences Schumann's interest in one's identity by incorporating the "proliferation of identity" in *Flegeljahre* (1804) (Perry 2007, 14). According to Perry, this mentioned work "[operates] through highly prospective and volatile mental manoeuvres to recreate the dynamics of multiplying the self (Perry 2007, 14). Throughout

Schumann's life, he enjoyed becoming other people, while simultaneously creating a "network of voices" that he could speak to, against and for, but always filtered through his own voice. This quality he possessed reverts back to the literature he read all of his life, which undoubtedly continued into his music. (Perry 2007, 14)

COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

In order for a vocalist to perform Schumann's lieder with authenticity and vigor, one should be aware of the performance practices linked to his works. In the beginning of Richard Miller's book *Singing Schumann: An Interpretive Guide for Performers,* he begins the first chapter by describing biographical facts about Schumann. Miller refers to Schumann's literary background to connect the reader with his compositional style. He even states, "Biographical details of a composer are of secondary interest in determining how to perform the works themselves, but there is no better way to understand Schumann's orientation in his lieder composition than by recalling his immersions in the literary world around him" (Miller 2005, 3). Since previously discussing the significance of his literary background, where his love of text began, one is able to connect and identify other important characteristics of his lieder and discuss helpful performance practices. When Schumann began to compose for the voice, lieder were rarely performed in concert halls as they are today; instead, they were performed for "soirees and domestic music-making and geared toward the amateur musician." Schumann's task, however, though it was not an easy one, was to "infuse new life into an art form that had stagnated…" His aim was to renew the art of singing lieder by bringing a buoyancy of new sound and emotion for all varieties of musicians (Reinhard 1989, 7).

Whether a performer is an amateur musician or not, an awareness of Schumann's compositional techniques will assist in determining how best to approach his songs, and it will

reveal the diverse styles that exist among them. Some of those compositional techniques are as follows (see Appendix A for a detailed list):

- calculated reiterated chordal uniformity
- frequent use of dotted rhythms
- offbeat rhythms and syncopation
- coherent tonality schemes for cycles and for key relationships among related Lieder
- poetic recall through thematic repetition (Miller 2005, 9)

Chromaticism was another compositional technique used by Schumann, and according to Miller, it was used for "psychological insight, uncertainty, nostalgia, longing, despair, mystical states, and the evocation of nature." Schumann's settings are quite the contrast to the "soulfulness of the Brahms Lieder and Schubert Lieder, [which] remain within Classical dimensions of emotional control" (Miller 2005, 13). As a Romantic composer, chromaticism was a main ingredient of Schumann's harmonic language (Cooper 1952, 121). When a performer gains insight such as this, it gives access for further study of a song; it helps in understanding the song. Is Schumann highlighting a word or phrase through chromaticism? Why? What is the significance? This type of process helps the performer connect to the text with genuine understanding, emotion and artistry. It is most rewarding to watch a performer who has a deeper connection to the poetry, than one who does not.

In addition, Schumann frequently used another compositional technique which came from writings in his music journal: the duality of Florestan and Eusebius. When dissecting his vocal works, there are two distinct "personalities" to his compositional style, derived from Schumann's own imagination and who were "members" of the *Davidsbündler*. A flamboyant Florestan was a personality used to declare Schumann's aggressive viewpoints, while "his more temperate thoughts were expressed by the gentler Eusebius." The pair, used for Schumann's

critical commentary, were not only an indication of the division within his psyche, but were also used in his compositional techniques as well (Miller 2005, 4). "Schumann's impetuosity and unabashed strong emotion come into focus in Florestan mode, most strikingly in contrast to Eusebian moments of rhythmic moderation and tranquility" (Miller 2005, 14). However, "the singer who approaches the Schumann Lieder with hearts-and-flowers Romanticism" satirizes "the eagerness that Schumann introduces his lyrical and non-dramatic poetic sources." Miller continues to say, "His songs demand performance in which sensitivity, youthful exuberance, and impetuosity are united" (Miller 2005, 14). In other words, both singer and pianist must be able to balance the emotional demands of the poetry while remaining firm, yet relaxed in technique. Finson says, "Schumann's experience with concise, piquant musical characterization in his piano miniatures of the 1830s fitted him perfectly to produce lieder possessing exquisitely subtle but intense [poignancy]" (Finson 2007, 7). It is most important to note that Schumann's compositional techniques actualized his personal interpretation of a poet's meaning, which is an appreciable way to enhance the performer's understanding of style and interpretation (Miller 2005, 14).

Since every lied has its own characteristics, its "re-creation [invites] an individual artistic imagination as each performer reacts to the composer's intention" (Miller 2005, 15). However, there are certain performance practices common to all Schumann lieder (Miller 2005, 15). According to Jack M. Stein, there are also problems within German art songs regarding the combining of text and music (Stein 1971, 9). First, in the realm of performance practices, Richard Miller has exploited several principles for vocalists, as well as for pianists, to implement during the performance of lieder. He first explains that the basic qualities of music composition change from one decade to the next: "Music is often inappropriately forced into historical

periods of considerable length, sometimes as long as half a century or more." For each genre of music from Early Music to Post-Modern Music, there are no "beginning and terminating dates as though nothing changed until one style suddenly was surpassed or elevated to another level" (Miller 2005, 15). His point is that the history of music is not one of "static artistic strata but of flowing gradations of change" (Miller 2005, 15).

In other words, it is important to know what came before and after the composer's works in order to appropriately adapt to the stylistic characteristics of each musical period. For example, not differentiating between the performance styles of Schubert and Schumann is a common mistake (Miller 2005, 16). Schubert is considered the father of the nineteenth-century German art song and the "Romantic Classic" (Einstein 1947, 97). Throughout his creative life, he transformed the German art song and made a way for art songs of every language. A decade after his death, Schubert's "Romantic Classic tradition becomes the 'Romantic' in Schumann." Miller states that a "performance pitfall" for some singers and pianists is the belief that Robert Schumann is but an "extension of Franz Schubert." He goes on to say, "The reverse performance peril, and the more common, is to sing Schubert as though Schumann had already happened" (Miller 2005, 16). In avoiding the latter, it is pertinent for both pianists and singers to know that Schumann wanted the melody, as well as the accompaniment, to be of equal importance. Furthermore, this means that the pianist has to be as equally involved in the emotion behind the text, while the singer should be concerned with the harmonic structure of lieder.

Another significant principle Miller discusses is singing Schumann with excess romanticism. Although the majority of poems that inspired Schumann were of the Romantic era, many excesses in the performances of his lieder "come from applying late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century art song performance customs to them" (Miller 2005, 16). For a

performer who wishes to "stay on stylistic track" when performing the Schumann lieder, Miller lists some commonly used and "inappropriate singer mannerisms" to avoid:

- scooping into important words (beginning the note slightly under pitch, with gradual arrival at the tonal center)
- starting the vocal tone straight and then letting it "wiggle" with vibrato
- introducing rubato where the composer never intended
- detailing and underscoring each long note in every musical phrase
- negating the vocal legato on notes of short duration
- removing vibrancy on notes of short duration
- changing the dynamic intensity of each note in a phrase
- using exaggerated "vocal coloration" and "word painting" to the detriment of vocal timbre (Miller 2005, 16)

According to Miller, these mannerisms come from the "habit of asking music to serve chiefly as a vehicle for self-expression" and from singers and pianists forgetting that they are "*re-creators*, not *creators*, of the music in which they perform" (Miller 2005, 17). Miller adds that a singer's need to remain true to his or her own acoustic and physical dimensions is also important to note. Since every individual instrument is unique, dynamic levels ought to be relative to its dimensions as well as to hall ambiences (Miller 2005, 17) While all of these elements are valuable for any developing singer, implementing all of them can be a great task that even the most experienced singer must remember. However, if a performer is working towards a mature and stylistically appropriate performance, one needs to be aware of them.

One of the last principles Miller discusses when singing Schumann lieder is that the pianist is not an accompanist, but a collaborator (Miller 2005, 20). The level of skill needed from

the pianist for the performance of lieder is the same requirement of the solo pianist. Miller states, "The level of technical and musical skill demanded from a pianistic full partner is not less in the Lied than in the sonata and concerto literature" (Miller 2005, 20). He also challenges pianists to not develop the habit of awkwardly "striking the bass note in advance of other voices of a significant chord" because "keyboard kerplunking does not increase romanticism", but "destroys the phrase shape" (Miller 2005, 20).

Lastly, he gives two specific notes to both pianists and singers. First, both "singer and pianist need to be aware of how completely harmonic design and linguistic emphases are integrated with voice and keyboard timbres." This would involve a heavy dose of only listening to one another and deciding where each should pull back dynamically and where to give more sound; however, this usually depends on Schumann's original markings and of course, the text. Second, "awareness of the rhythm of the German language and its relationship to harmonic movement will also determine the tempo and the phrase pacing of each Lied" (Miller 2005, 20). Miller does not expound on what he means by the "rhythm of the German language", but it is important to note that a singer should be familiar with the German language in order to grasp its aesthetic. The German language has a distinct ebb and flow, regarding its consonants and vowels. For non-German singers to have fluidity and natural, speech-like phrases, singers must constantly speak the text, review the rules for German lyric diction, and refresh their memory during practice sessions.

APPLICATION: MIGNON LIEDER

Once a singer has chosen the Schumann lieder to learn and eventually perform, one needs to be able to apply what they have learned regarding Schumann's detailed attention to the text, his compositional techniques, and stylistic performance practices of his lieder. In order to assimilate and apply these techniques and practices for a stylistically authentic performance, Schumann's *Mignon Lieder* will be analyzed both poetically and musically. Published in 1849, this group of four songs is part of *Lieder und Gesänge aus Wilhelm Meister*, Op. 98a. The entire song cycle, a total of nine songs, is based on the text found in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship.* The cycle includes songs of Mignon and the harper, but the *Mignon Lieder* form the most logical performance group for the female voice (Miller 2005, 187).

The *Mignon Lieder* (see Appendix B for poetic translations) captures the unique story of a young girl, Mignon, who has been kidnapped by a troupe of actors, and then miraculously saved by a handsome man, Wilhelm Meister who takes her home and treats her as his own child. On a side note, it is not necessary to read the entire novel in order to understand the unique relationship between these two characters; however, reading the text actually from the novel will be extremely helpful to the performer regarding the context of each song. Also, it is important to note that Mignon actually sings each song in the novel, and Goethe includes detailed information about Mignon's mood and her intentions observed through the eyes of Wilhelm.

For example, the first song, *Kennst du das Land*, which can be found at the beginning of Book III, is the only strophic form of the group, having three verses of varying emotion. In the first verse, Mignon expresses her desire to go back to her homeland of Italy. The second is her memory of the exquisite house she once lived in with great columns, and statues that seemed to

show sympathy towards her when she was sad (Glass 2002, 188). In the third verse, she seems to relive the night she was abducted, where she was carried up mountains on a mule through thick clouds. Her kidnappers tell Mignon to be still or she would be eaten by a dragon waiting in its lair. In the novel, Goethe tells us how Mignon sang the song:

> "She began every verse in a stately and solemn manner, as if she wished to draw attention towards something wonderful, as if she had something weighty to communicate. In the third line, her tones became deeper and gloomier; the words, "Dost know?" were uttered with a show of mystery...and her "Let us go!" she modified at each repetition, so that now it appeared to entreat and implore, not to impel and persuade" (Goethe 1842, 135).

In *Kennst du das Land?,* Mignon is on "the threshold of adolescent uncertainty, a girl dressed in men's clothing who identifies the young Wilhelm successively as her beloved, her protector, and her father" (Finson 2007, 173). All verses are exactly the same besides an optional high A for the third verse, which conveys Mignon's darker mood and longing for Wilhelm to go with her. Even though Schumann originally included the song in his *Album for the Young*, Op. 68, he remarked that he saw Mignon "on the threshold of adult life" (Miller 2005, 186). Walsh explains that Schumann "captures [the] blend of adult passion and childish bewilderment which lie[s] at the heart of Goethe's great lyric" (Walsh, p. 84). This is expressed through the beginning keyboard melody which speaks of "nostalgia and longing" through the use of chromaticism.

At first, the singer begins with a "semi-recitative style" which builds up to a soaring melody that becomes unrestricted (Miller 2005, 187). The first nine measures set the tone for the entire song, and speaks with a gentle ease. Then, in measure 10, the rhythm changes to a triplet figure that moves forward with agitation, which leads

to the first moment of intensity at "ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht" (Miller 2005, 187). The triplet figures continue to move the phrases forward through the first "Dahin!" and to measure 24. Finson states "that the "dahin" is taken so lightly by most composers, like a sixteenth note...surely it should be more fervently and meaningfully accentuated than one finds in most of the well-known settings" (Finson 2007, 36).

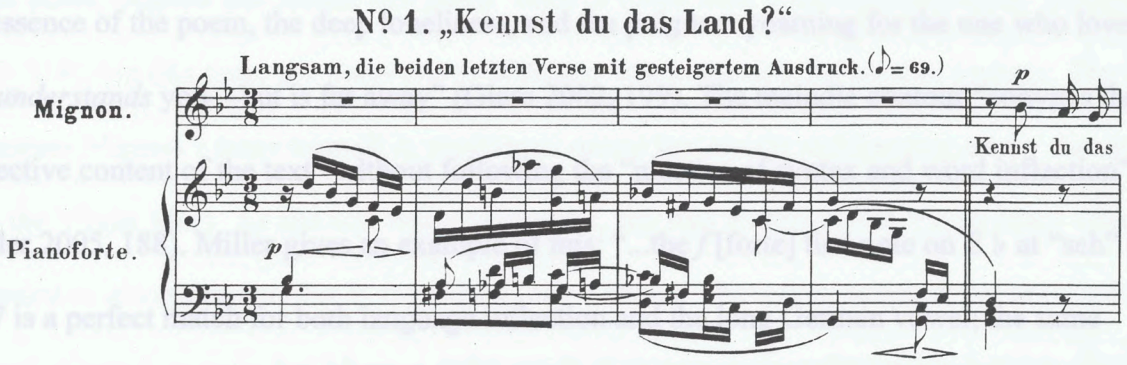
The material before and after each strophe allows the listener time to let the text settle, and it seems to give Mignon a chance to reminisce. To help the transition from verse two to verse three, Schumann does not resolve "ziehn" in measure 53 as he did in measure 27, instead he uses an open minor iv chord. This helps guide the listener to verse three, while conveying Mignon's message of heartache and longing for a better life. In verse three, there is an optional high A♮ to sing on the word "Drachen", which is the pinnacle of her pain that does not weaken until the last tonic chord of the piano. A strophic setting has its challenges due to the music being the same for each verse; however, the text becomes the focal point just as Schumann intended. "The vocal performer must be willing to bare *her* soul…The soprano or mezzo-soprano who sings this Lied will need to make use of sumptuous vocal timbre" (Miller 2005,187).

Although Goethe creates a AABB rhyme scheme for each verse, the repeated text of "Dahin! dahin…" seems to be in a free verse style which creates the idea of release and tension within the text. However, Finson states that Schumann has ignored the meter of Goethe's verse, "treating it almost as prose and emphasizing the most striking lines or individual words" (Finson 2007,174-175). Schumann's quick alternation between lyrical and dramatic styles "...[reflect] the tension between the inner world of the soul and the outer world of action [as] presented in Goethe's novel" (Finson, p. 176-177, Daverio, 1997). While composing the *Wilhelm Meister*

settings, Reinhard adds that "Schumann was entirely absorbed in dramatic music and music for the stage", which is reflected in each song including the harper settings (Reinhard 1989, 46).

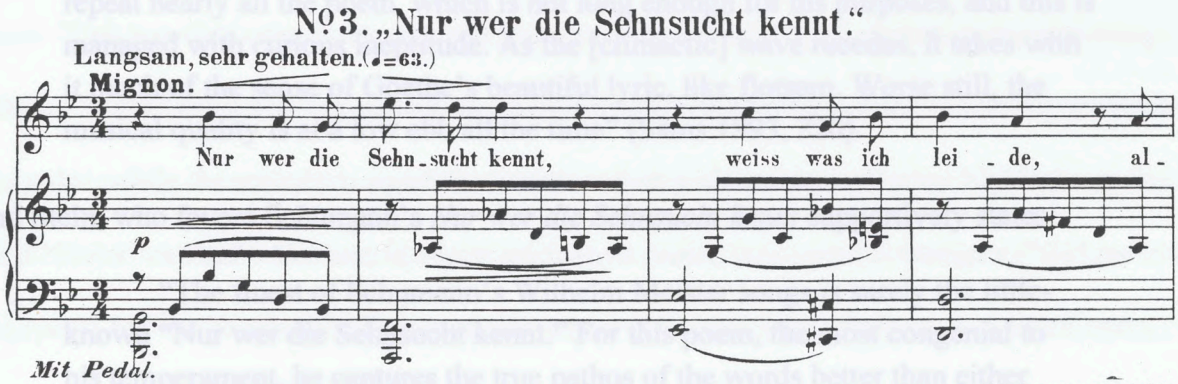
Schumann's setting of *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt* certainly does not lack drama or a declamatory style. It is one of German literature's most famous poems that has been set by composers such as Liszt, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky (Miller 2005, 187). Each of these composers characterized Mignon very differently from one another. Within the two pages of Schumann's setting, it is packed with "expanded chromatic language" to express intense sadness, while sudden changes of tempo produce the inner teetering of Mignon's thoughts and emotions. A frightening minor sixth is an overarching climax on the word "brennt" ("burn") in measure 16 on a high A ♭. A chromatic motive in the beginning is reminiscent of the material in *Kennst du das Land?* that also returns in the last four measures (See Example 1); this is the golden thread that keeps the two songs seamlessly connected as well as the G minor key.

Ex. 1. Robert Schumann, "Kennst du das Land?" from *Lieder und Gesänge aus Goethe's 'Wilhelm Meister'*, op. 98a, mm. 1-5



(Schumann 1849, 2)

Robert Schumann, "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" from *Lieder und Gesänge aus Goethe's 'Wilhelm Meister'*, op. 98a, mm. 1-4



(Schumann 1849, 11)

The poem can be found in Book IV, at the end of Chapter 11 of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship.* In the novel, Wilhelm "fell into a dreamy longing" while Mignon and the harper sing "with a touching expression, in the form of an irregular duet" (Goethe 1842, 218). Although Schumann's setting is for a soloist, the piano is given the responsibility of harmony and having "the last wordless word" (Dunsby 2007, 42). Glass states that "Schumann's moving and expressive version, when interpreted by a singer who is sensitive to its special beauty, captures the essence of the poem, the deep loneliness, and the poignant yearning for the one who loves and *understands* you---but is far away" (Glass 2002, 199). The melodic contour "conveys the subjective content of the text" without following the "niceties of syntax and word inflection" (Miller 2005, 188). Miller gives an example of this: "...the *f* [forte] tied note on E ♭ at "seh" in bar 7 is a perfect match for both language inflection and the long German vowel; the same rhythmic duration that occurs on "nach" (short voweled and not an important part of the sentence) in bar 9 does not match. However, this can be found in songs of almost every composer, but Schumann is often accused of distorting Goethe's verses (Miller 2005, 188).

As supportive as other sources have been towards *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt,* there is also criticism regarding Schumann's setting of Goethe's poem. Sams reciprocates with saying:

> "In order to realize it [the general structure of the song] Schumann has to repeat nearly all the poem, which is not long enough for his purposes, and this is managed with curious ineptitude. As the [climactic] wave recedes, it takes with it much of the sense of Goethe's beautiful lyric, like flotsam. Worse still, the musical quality is at a low ebb all the time" (Sams 1993, 220).

And Stein, who favors Schumann's *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt* supportively states:

> "The finest of Schumann's Wilhelm Meister songs is surely the little-known "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt." For this poem, the most congenial to his temperament, he captures the true pathos of the words better than either Schubert or Wolf, or Tchaikovsky for that matter. Rich dark harmonies and a stunning vocal line set the mood at the outset, and it is sustained throughout the song. The texture is uniform" (Stein 1971, 124-25).

While it is important to consider both sides, criticism and praise, a singer ultimately has to decide what is honest to the context of the character and text. One should consider the composer's intentions both poetically and musically, while being able to make artistic choices that they can fully support with specific details and an intelligible explanation.

Heiss' mich nicht reden, the third song of *Mignon Lieder*, appears at the end of Book V. In the novel, Mignon has recited this poem "once or twice with great expressiveness" (Goethe 1842, 319), but this time, she sings this to Wilhelm who is leaving for another journey. The song represents Mignon's inner turmoil in wanting to reveal her secrets and keeping a vow she made with the Virgin Mary. As she was being kidnapped, she was visited by the Virgin Mary who promised to always protect her if she would keep a secret. The secret, which is not revealed until the end of novel, reveals that Mignon is the result of an incestuous relationship between the old harper, Augustin, and his sister. Mignon behaves strangely throughout the novel by having convulsive fits of rage and she refers to herself in third person, but her origin is the greatest kept

secret (Jensen 2001, 244). According to Jensen, Schumann was "profoundly taken with the character of Mignon...He was attracted [to] her childlike innocence [and] moved by the sorrow of her existence" (Jensen 2001, 244-245).

This heartfelt song is another extension of Mignon's deep conviction and unrelenting sadness. In the first verse, the melody is set by accented quarter-note chords, creating a march-like pulse, while the melody is carefully introduced on a sforzando half-note, highlighting the word "Heiss" or "bid". The text is, *Heiss mich nicht reden, heiss mich schweigen* ("Bid me not [to] speak, bid me be silent"). The word *schweigen* ("silent") is emphasized by a ritard and a *Langsamer* tempo (See Appendix C). In the second verse, Stein thinks the composition "...gets Schumann into serious difficulty [with] the poem, for though the first allows a passionate interpretation, the epigrammatic second does not…" (Stein 1971, 123). On the other hand, Miller believes it is a "remarkable composition in its union of contrasting elements. Schumann uses contrasting tempos, chromaticism, change of key, and various dynamic markings to bring the text to life with authenticity and genuine emotion. In measures five through seven, Miller explains that the verse *denn mein Geheimnis ist mir Pflicht* ("For my duty is to keep my secret") has "all the mystery and pain of which musical language is capable" especially on the "tortured arrival at D ♭ on 'Pflicht!'" (Miller 2005, 190). In measure seven, an eighth-note pattern briskly moves the tempo forward at *Schneller,* and continues through the next *Langsamer* verse until measure 46. Also in measure seven, Miller notes "an expressive embellishment...the left hand [moving] to the treble octave" (Miller 2005, 190).

A new verse begins in measure 15 that is reflective with a "cantabile vocal melody", which intensifies at the *nach und nach schneller* ("gradually faster") (Miller 2005, 190). This seems to represent Mignon's increased aggravation of carrying the burden of a secret---unable to

tell anyone. Schumann uses "reiterated chordal movement" under the melody, which is "an old habit [he] uses for producing movement and excitement" (Miller 2005, 191). The climax of the song happens on *allein ein Schwur drückt mir die Lippen zu* ("but a vow forces my lips to stay closed") with a sforzando highlighting *Schwur* or "vow", in measure 38, that seamlessly leads to a diminuendo on the words *und nur ein Gott vermag sie aufzuschliessen* ("and only a god has the power to unlock them"). After the poem is finished, Schumann repeats "nur ein Gott", reiterating Mignon's determination to keep the vow "only a god" could make her tell. Then in measure 54, lines from the poem are combined to make a "dark adagio coda" concluding an astonishing "tour de force" composition (Stein 1971, 124).

According to Stein, the entire song "[exploits] [the] emotional potentialities in the poem in a way that Goethe would never have dreamed possible". In addition, he states, "The song is so compelling, except for the second stanza, that one cannot help wishing [Schumann] had simply left that stanza out" (Stein 1971, 124). It is important to note that the keyboard becomes an orchestra in the song, and the voice is required to change colors in order to mirror the "fluctuating moods" of Mignon (Miller 2005, 191). Also, he includes that *Heiss mich nicht reden* is "some of the most emotive composing ever to come from the hand of Robert Schumann or any other composer" (Miller 2005, 191).

Schumann once wrote in his diary: "The poem has to lie in the singer's arms like a bride, free, happy and complete, then it sounds as if coming from a heavenly distance" (Reinhard 1989, 18). The last of the *Mignon Lieder*, *So lasst mich scheinen*, is the epitome of how a poem should lie in a singer's embrace, even though it has received "low marks from critics" (Miller 2005, 191). Desmond comments on its "awkward leaps in the vocal line" and "some unfortunate word stress", while another criticism says the vocal line has "hysterical" quality (Desmond 1972, 50;

Fischer-Dieskau 1981,164). Miller counteracts that "this character of melodic "hysteria"...marks another success of Schumann's conscious expansion of the boundaries of the traditional Lied" (Miller 2005, 191).

So lasst mich scheinen takes place after Mignon has passed out gifts at a birthday party, dressed as an angel, in Book VIII, Chapter 2 of the novel. She seems to have slowly matured from a tomboy-type figure to a young lady dressed in a long white dress with a golden girdle around her waist and a golden ribbon in her hair. Even after she plays her role of the birthday angel, Mignon refuses to take her costume off and daintily perches herself on top of a writing table and begins to sing her last song (Carlyle 1899, 94-95). Sadly, she eventually dies of a broken heart when she sees Wilhelm taking a romantic interest in another woman. In the novel, Wilhelm was told, in general terms, of Mignon's condition before she sings her song:

> "...the poor child was gradually consuming under the influence of a few deep feelings; that, with her extreme excitability, and her endeavouring to hide it, her little heart often suffered violent and dangerous pains; that on any unexpected agitation of her mind, this primary organ of life would suddenly stop, and no trace of the vital movement could be felt in the good child's bosom. That when such an agonising cramp was past, the force of nature would again express itself in strong pulses, and now torment the child by its excess, as she had before suffered by its detect" (Carlyle 1899, 93).

Since Wilhelm was unaware of her declining health, the previous excerpt gives the singer more insight into Mignon's perplexing words and the reason she sings them. It seems as if she is exhausted from hiding burdensome secrets, feeling abandoned, and enduring emotional trauma. She wishes to pretend to be a normal child for as long as possible, while contemplating the sweetness of death.

So lasst mich scheinen represents a type of preparatory speech for her eventual death. She finds solace in knowing that she will be in a better place, where she will not have to worry about clothes or whether someone knows if she is a boy or girl; it will not matter anymore. Even at her young age, Mignon is wise beyond her years because of the conditions she has experienced and the way she has been treated by people who did not love her. For this song, Schumann has chosen a major mode that constantly changes keys. The key of G major seems to represent Mignon's positive outlook on dying and no longer hurting on this earth, while the wavering of keys symbolizes her adventurous, yet wounded spirit. According to Miller, the opening measures already capture the fantasy and reality of "Mignon as [an] actress" and "Mignon as [a] young woman aware of death" due to their harmonic and rhythmic figurations (Miller 2005, 193). Overall, the melodic line can seem disjointed and unstable, since the verses seem to run together almost without pause (Finson 2007, 179). However, in measure 12 (See Appendix C), *Dort ruh ich eine kleine Stille* ("There I shall rest for a quiet little time") (Glass 2002, 205) is pianissimo. Suddenly, as if Mignon can no longer hold back her emotion, the melodic line bursts upward, then descends on the words *Dann öffnet sich der frische Blick* ("Then my refreshed eyes will open)" (Glass 2002, 205). The trickling of eighth-notes, dotted eighth-notes, and sixteenth-notes keeps the melodic line moving forward, never becoming too stagnant. The shorter note values, both in the voice and piano, also attribute to Schumann's attention to text. If they were long and drawn out, one would not receive the same emotional urgency that is Mignon's increasing pain. In measure 33, Schumann uses a "chromatic detour" in the third verse into minor mode for the lines *Vor Kummer altert' ich zu frühe, macht mich auf ewig wieder jung* ("Through sorrow I

became old too early, make me young again forever") (Finson 2007, 179 Glass 2002, 205), as if "Schumann...fully aware of the ravages of time, speaks through youthful Mignon" in her last words of hope (Miller 2005, 193).

For further instruction on performance, Miller explains, "The singer and pianist must allow themselves to be transported by Schumann's own creative imaginings into the composer's personal world of pain and its resolution." He continues stating that *So lasst mich scheinen* "demands the most lyric and the most dramatic capabilities of both voice and pianoforte. This concluding song of the four *Mignon Lieder* sums up universal longing: Mignon's, Schumann's, that of its performers, and that of those who hear it" (Miller 2005, 193).

CONCLUSION: SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Robert Schumann's *Mignon Lieder* is a fascinating group of songs that seems to be overlooked in today's realm of classical music; however, it offers the expansive world of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* through the eyes of a young girl who has known much sorrow, but finds hope in eternal rest. The research found for this research project has brought a reasonable amount of commentary and facts based on Schumann's diaries, his colleague's recollections, and several authors who have dedicated their research in order to find the most authentic information on his life, the literature he read, his quirks, and his philosophy.

Schumann unabashedly loved literature and poetry, which tied his lieder together. He believed tones were words at a heavenly elevated level. Growing up he was surrounded by literature, not only at school, but in his father's library at home, where he was treated with works by Jean Paul, Goethe, Schiller and Chamisso. He was blessed with a literary background that

many dream of, which was captivated in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, the music journal that he co-founded in Leipzig. There he could express his musical criticisms through at least two of his own personalities he named, Florestan and Eusebius. The creativity and enjoyment of developing characters extended into his music.

There are many compositional techniques used by Schumann observed by several sources. Each technique had a specific purpose, especially when he used chromaticism. When it is found in any work of his, singers and pianists should pay close attention. He used chromaticism to evoke nostalgia, longing, despair, and characteristics of nature. Schumann was noted to be a meticulous, hard-working and at times, difficult composer whose attention to detail was compelling to many. Although he received much criticism for his works, there is much to be learned from his distinguished life, despite his untimely admittance to a mental institution. Moreover, had he lived longer, it is believed by many that there would be plenty more offerings of music to be learned and enjoyed. Richard Miller is one of those believers who is a positive and influential voice for the performance practices of Schumann's Lieder. His book, *Singing Schumann,* is an incredible source for not only singers, but also teachers and pianists. While conducting research, he seems to be the leading author on Schumann's specific compositional techniques and performance practices. Miller includes a thorough blend of negative and positive feedback from other authors, historic insight from Schumann's diaries, and invaluable advice for how singers and pianists can refine their performances.

In this age of music where young singers and even pianists have access to recordings on numerous websites such as YouTube and Medici.tv, they still do not have the luxury or accessibility to watch live performances of authentic German singing. Miller, in all of his experience as a vocal pedagogue and professor of singing, did the research and gathered

performance practices specifically for Schumann lieder; his books are a foundational gift that can be easily expanded. Also, Reinhard, Finson, and Glass have tremendous insight on *Mignon Lieder* that help singers understand specific characteristics in regard to tempo, rhythm, and harmony. They encourage singers to read between the lines from a different perspective: Are they wanting to learn the song for themselves? To understand the character more? Or are they wanting to become authentic artists of German Lieder? These are questions that these authors pose, and while some suggest their ideas, others are blunt about the facts of genuine performance practices of *Mignon Lieder.*

This research project gathered information from a variety of sources that will hopefully inspire singers new and old to Robert Schumann's Lieder. It seems that *Mignon Lieder* has not been a popular group of songs to perform among the past several generations; however, this author hopes to an inspiring mark for those interested in singing Lieder of genuine emotion and compositional excellence. While it is obvious that performers should become more acquainted with Lieder from all compositional phases of Schumann's life, they should also become familiar with composers that came before him, such as Schubert. Comparing Schubert's unique compositional style and performance practices to Schumann's will give the performer a better sense as to why Schumann's Lieder was so innovative for its day. Also, since Schumann was an avid reader and lover of text, it would be ideal for singers to read the books that inspired him so much. Jean Paul's *Flehjahre* can be found in English by Eliza Lee and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* can be easily found in English; however, most of his works are only in the German language. Since Jean Paul was such a significant influence on Schumann, it would be helpful if someone decided to translate his greatest works into English.

This research project was written in hopes of finding inspiring points-of-view that would give singers tools to find their own interpretations, and how to link their own voice with the emotions of the text in a way Schumann would have approved. Although, one is not able to ask what he prefers or ask for his opinions, one *is* able to use what one has been given through his musical markings and his diary entries—but sometimes, it is not enough. In order for the singer, who desires real, authentic artistry, one has to have an understanding and a reason for every word, every dynamic, every nuance from the harmony to the rhythm. When one is able to progress farther than one thought one could, preparing for a performance by learning all the elements of one's songs and asking questions, one becomes the artist one has longed to be. Researching the best techniques or performance practices are great tools and should be done; however, at some point, a performer needs to perform. Once one has done the work it takes to perform well, enjoying the process of learning and doing it with excellence, it is then one's turn to share his or her talent with others.

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APPENDIX A

Richard Miller's Full List of Compositional Devices in Schumann Lieder

- calculated reiterated chordal uniformity
- arpeggiated keyboard configurations
- frequent use of dotted rhythms
- offbeat rhythms and syncopation
- improvisatory-like pianistic configurations
- frequent and sometimes extensive pianistic digressions in prelude (*Vorspiel),* interlude *(Zwischspiel),* and postlude *(Nachspiel)*
- tonality ambiguity (the avoidance of a key center until the voice establishes it)
- coherent tonality schemes for cycles and for key relationships among related Lieder
- chromaticism to enhance introspection
- overlapping of pianoforte and voice in the development of thematic material
- melody paralleled in voice and keyboard
- frequently occurring melodic nuclei
- close-intervallic melodic structure
- frequent repeated single-note (*eintönig*) melodic phrase beginnings
- motivic juxtaposition of exuberance and quietude (Florestan/Eusebius)
- frequent preference for word inflection over poetic meter
- poetic recall through thematic repetition

APPENDIX B

Beaumont Glass' Poetic Translations for *Mignon Lieder*

Kennst du das Land?

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn,
Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-Orangen glühn,
Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht,
Die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht?
Kennst du es wohl?
Dahin! dahin Möcht ich mit dir, O mein Geliebter, ziehn.

Kennst du das Haus? Auf Säulen ruht sein Dach.
Es glänzt der Saal, es schimmert das Gemach,
Und Marmorbilder stehn und sehn mich an:
Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, getan?
Kennst du es wohl?
Dahin! dahin Möcht ich mit dir, o mein Beschützer, ziehn.

Kennst du den Berg und seinen Wolkensteg?
Das Maultier sucht im Nebel seinen Weg;
In Höhlen wohnt der Drachen alte Brut;
Es stürzt der Fels,
und über ihn die Flut!
Kennst du ihn wohl?
Dahin! dahin Geht unser Weg! O Vater, laß uns ziehn!

Do You Know the Land?

Do you know the land where lemon trees blossom,
Where in dark foliage golden oranges glow,
Where a gentle breeze blows from the blue sky,
Where the myrtle grows quietly and the laurel stands tall?
Do you know it, perhaps?
There! there I would like to go with you, O my beloved.

Do you know the house? Its roof rests on columns,
The great hall gleams, the chamber shimmers,
And marble statues stand and look at me:
"What have they done to you, poor child?" they seem to
Say, "Do you know it, perhaps?"
There! there I would like to go with you, O my protector.

Do you know the mountain and its footpath in the clouds?
The mule seeks its way through the mist;
The ancient brood of dragons lives in caves there,
The rock falls away steeply,
And over it plunges downwards.
Do you know it, perhaps?
There! there lies our way! O father, let us go!

Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt

Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt,
Weiss, was ich leide!
Allein und abgetrennt von aller Freude,
Seh ich ans Firmament nach jener Seite!

Ach! der mich liebt und kennt ist in der Weite.
Es schwindelt mir, es brennt mein Eingeweide.
Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt,
Weiss, was ich leide!

Only Someone Who Knows Longing

Only someone who knows longing,
Can know what I am suffering,
Alone and separated from all joy,
I look at the sky in that direction!

Ah! The one who loves me and *knows* me is far away.
My head is reeling, my vitals are burning.
Only someone who knows longing,
Can know what I am suffering.

Heiss mich nicht reden

Heiss mich nicht reden, heiss mich schweigen,
Denn mein Geheimnis ist mir Pflicht,
Ich möchte dir mein ganzes Innre zeigen,
Allein das Schicksal will es nicht.

Zur rechten Zeit vertreibt der Sonne Lauf
Die finstre Nacht,
Und sie muß sich erhellen,
Der harte Fels schließt seinen Busen auf,
Mißgönnt der Erde nicht die tiefverborgnen Quellen.

Ein jeder sucht im Arm des Freundes Ruh,
Dort kann die Brust in Klagen sich ergießen,
Allein ein Schwur drückt mir die Lippen zu,
Und nur ein Gott vermag sie aufzuschließen.

Bid Me Not Speak

Bid me not speak, bid me be silent!
For my duty is to keep my secret.
I would like to show you all my inner being,
But fate does not allow me to.

At the right time the sun in its course,
Will drive away the dark night,
And night must turn to day;
The hard rock will open its bosom,
And not begrudge the earth its deep, hidden springs.

Everyone seeks peace in the arms of a friend;
There the heart can pour itself out in lamentations;
But a vow forces my lips to stay closed,
And only a god has the power to unlock them.

So lasst mich scheinen

So lasst mich scheinen, bis ich werde,
Zieht mir das weisse Kleid nicht aus!
Ich eile von der schönen Erde
Hinab in jenes feste Haus.

Dort ruh' ich eine kleine Stille,
Dann öffnet sich der frische Blick;
Ich lasse dann die reine Hülle,
Den Gürtel und den Kranz zurück.

Und jene himmlischen Gestalten
Sie fragen nicht nach Mann und Weib,
Und keine Kleider, keine Falten
Umgeben den verklärten Leib.

Zwar lebt' ich ohne Sorg' und Mühe,
Doch fühlt' ich tiefen Schmerz genung.
Vor Kummer altert' ich zu frühe;
Macht mich auf ewig wieder jung!

Such Let Me Seem

So let me appear, till I become:
Do not make me take off this white dress!
I shall soon leave this beautiful earth,
And go down into that secure house below.

There I shall rest for a quiet little time;
Then my refreshed eyes will open,
Then I shall leave behind this pure white dress,
The girdle, and the wreath.

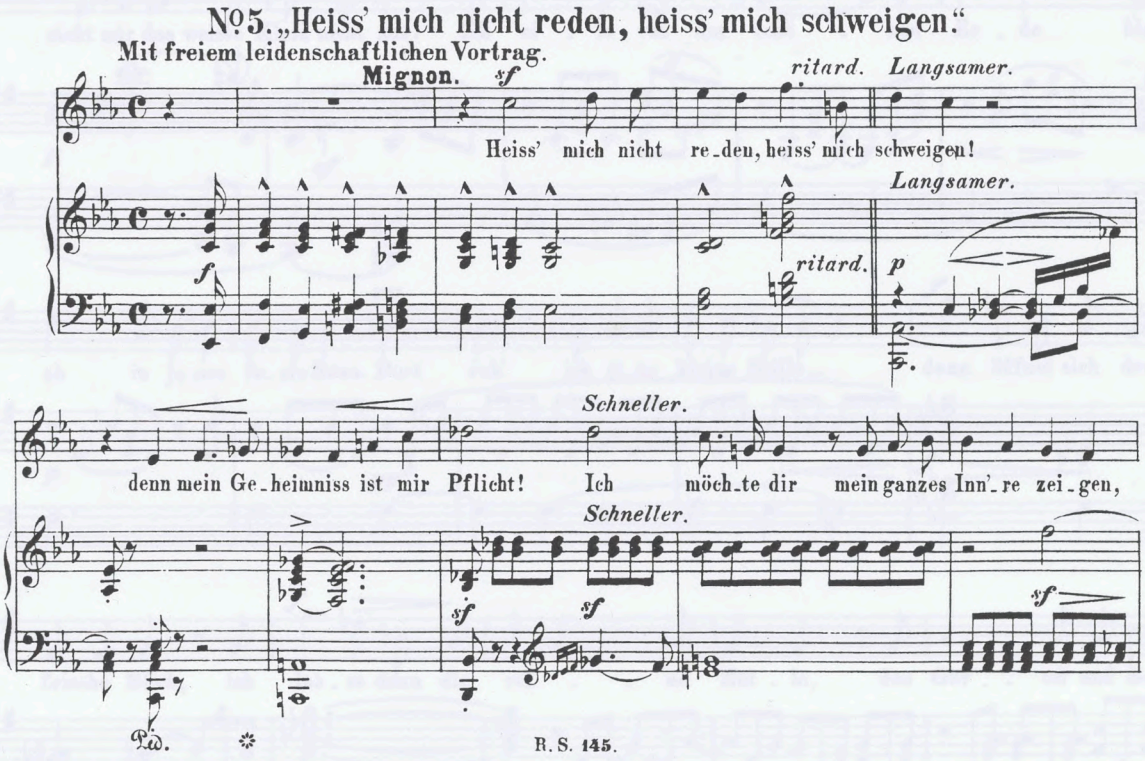
And those heavenly beings,
Will not ask who is a man, who is a woman;
And no clothes, no draperies,
Will enclose the transfigured body.

True, I lived without care and trouble;
But nevertheless felt deep pain often enough;
Through sorrow I became too old too early;
Make me young again forever.

APPENDIX C

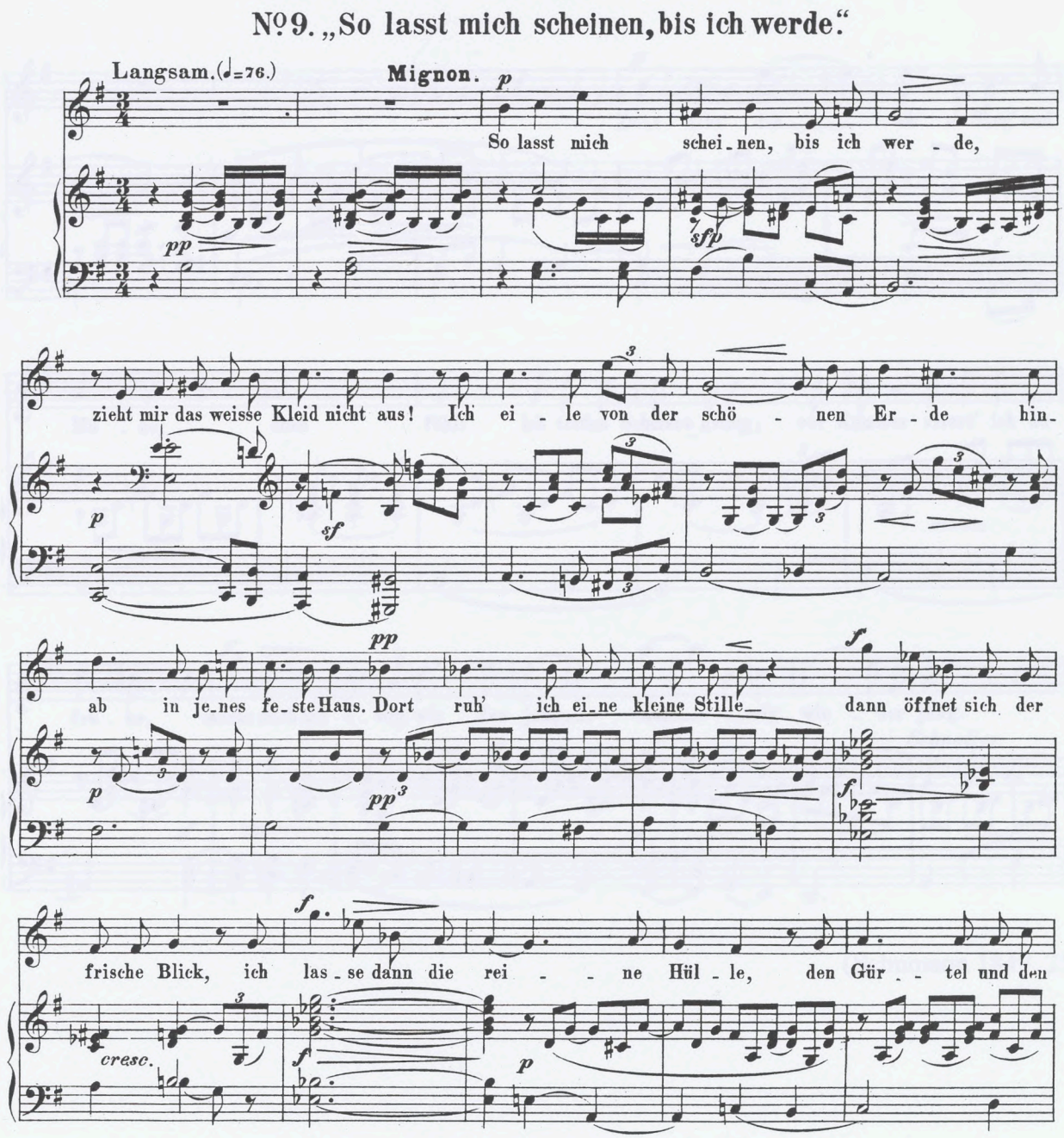
Musical Examples from *Mignon Lieder*

Robert Schumann, "Heiss' mich nicht reden" from *Lieder und Gesänge aus Goethe's 'Wilhelm Meister'*, op. 98a, mm. 1-9.



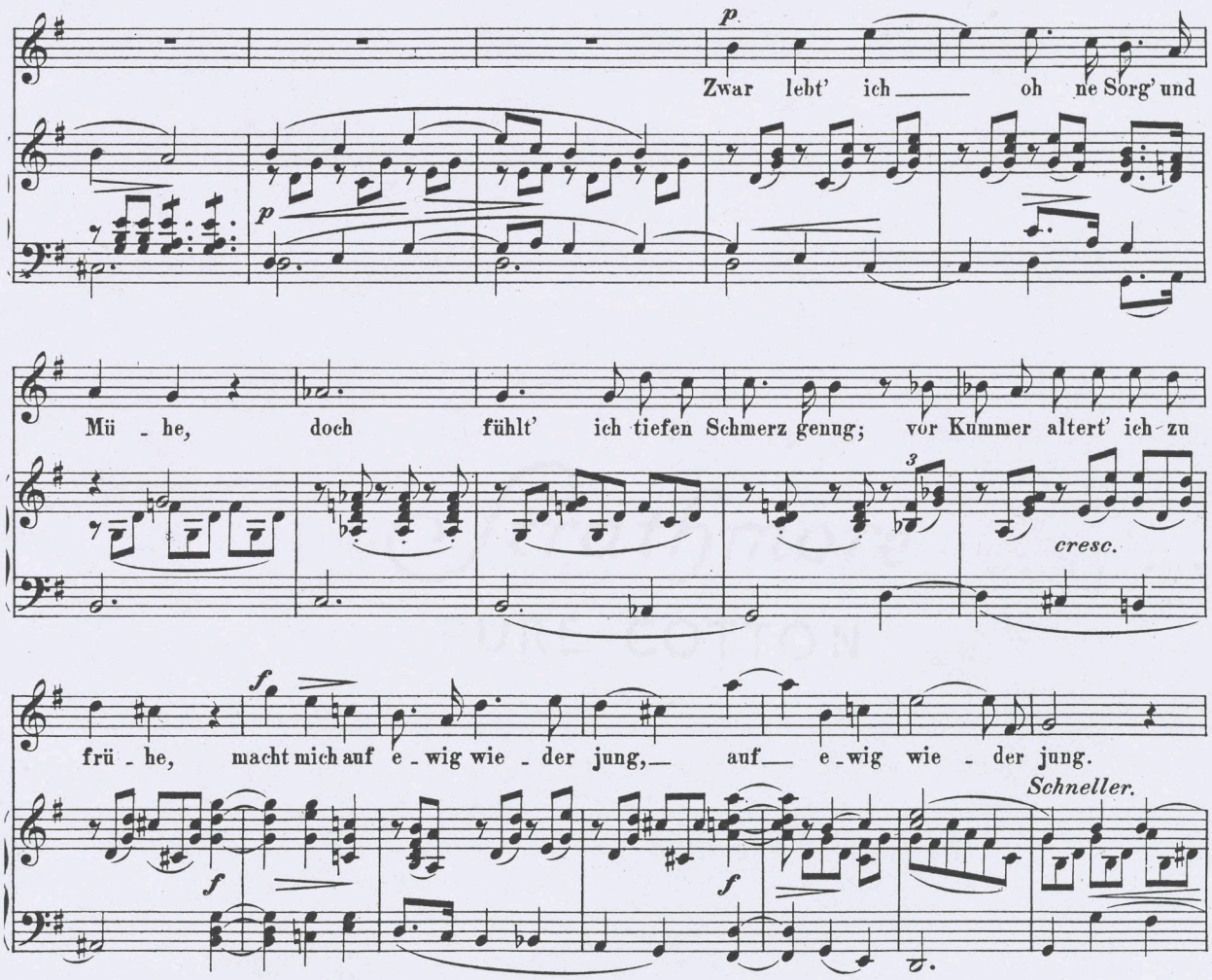
(Schumann 1849, 15)

Robert Schumann, "So lasst mich scheinen" from *Lieder und Gesänge aus Goethe's 'Wilhelm Meister'*, op. 98a, mm. 1-20.



(Schumann 1849, 24)

Robert Schumann, "So lasst mich scheinen" from *Lieder und Gesänge aus Goethe's 'Wilhelm Meister'*, op. 98a, mm. 31-47.



(Schumann 1849, 25)